



WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF TRACEY HALSTEAD
CONNECTICUT COUNCIL OF FAMILY SERVICE AGENCIES
ON R. B. 1361 AN ACT CONCERNING ADMINISTRATION OF THE TEMPORARY
FAMILY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM
MARCH 8, 2007

Thank you Senator Harris, Representative Villano and members of the Human Services Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on R. B. 1361. I am Tracey Halstead, the Director of Programs for the Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies. Throughout the past decade of welfare reform, the Council has served over 7,000 TANF recipients and Safety Net clients through the statewide Empowering People for Success program. This program provides homebased assessment, outreach, case management, advocacy, referral and clinical services through contracts with the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Department of Labor (DOL). Only those TANF recipients facing significant barriers to employment, those at risk of losing cash assistance or those who have been sanctioned off cash assistance are currently eligible for our services based on existing statute and contracts. Many facets of the proposed bill will help to significantly improve not only the lives of those we presently serve but also allow us to serve more individuals on state assistance who are striving to achieve economic independence.

Specifically, the Council applauds the recommendation to open the Safety Net to those individuals who make good faith efforts to improve their situation yet have barriers that prevent them from becoming employed at a sustainable level of self sufficiency at the time that their cash assistance ends. We would also recommend that the Committee consider opening Safety Net services to certain TFA clients still receiving benefits so that basic needs payments may be available to them. Currently, Safety Net clients are able to receive all of our case management and support services plus basic needs assistance in the form of food vouchers, rental assistance, and utility payments. Yet the Safety Net clients are only eligible for these services after they have lost their cash assistance due to sanctions for non-compliance. Our clients in our other two program components, the Employment Success Program and those with Individual Performance Contracts, are not eligible for the program's basic needs assistance despite the fact that they have made or are making efforts to comply with their employment plan. In essence, the present system provides intensive resources for clients only after they have failed instead of supporting them in their good faith efforts toward independence. The recommended changes in the eligibility for safety net will rectify this inequity and allow us to help clients establish further stability on their way off of welfare and into employment.

One recent case might have had a very different ending had the expansion of Safety Net services been available to her. The situation was a single parent in the Employment Success Program with two teenage sons. She was employed part time at Subway, was battling drug and alcohol addictions, was seen repeatedly in the emergency room for mental health issues and developed related health concerns. To her credit, she

remained compliant with her employment plan throughout her struggles. Despite her best efforts, her income between her employment and her assistance was not enough to maintain housing for herself and her sons. She ended up in one room of a hotel and her sons went to their father. This resulted in the mother losing her TANF benefits as the children were no longer residing with her, the father became a TANF recipient, and the lives of the boys were disrupted in an extremely negative fashion. Had the mother not remained in compliance with her employment plan, she would have potentially become eligible for rental assistance through the Safety Net program. In effect, this woman was penalized, and was unable to keep her children, because her good faith effort at staying employed made her ineligible for the types of support necessary to maintain housing and keep her family together.

The Council also supports the increase in TFA benefits of 10% in the first year with annual formula increases thereafter, the provision for exemption from time limits for parents with disabilities, and the creation of a Work Transition Program to help families step down from assistance rather than stop abruptly. All of these items will help those in need immensely.

Again, thank you for this opportunity. I may be reached as indicated below to answer any questions you may have or to provide you with further information.

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